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### SW 400.01: Social Work Research

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## Social Work Research SW 400

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**Office hrs:** Mon, Wed 8:00 AM - 10:00 AM, Wed 1:00 - 3:00 Thurs 8-10, or by appointment  
**Class Time:** Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 10:10 - 11:00  
**Class:** LA 308  
**Prerequisites:** SW 360

### **Introduction:**

To a student, the term research is often scary. It is usually associated with a form of scientific inquiry that relates to the physical sciences. However, research is part of everything we do. It is a thought process we use to solve problems, a method of inquiry that helps us build knowledge. In essence, research is a scientific process we use in every aspect of our lives.

--Bruce D. Friedman

Human beings enter this world with an unending curiosity about themselves, others, and their surrounding environment. In this sense we are all “born” researchers. At its essence research is inquisitiveness in thought and action in the pursuit of new knowledge and discovery through a creative, conceptual process of researcher engagement with the world and its mysteries.

Social work research applies the scientific method to this learning process and takes many shapes and forms. Social workers involved in diverse aspects of the social service system use principles of social research methods to evaluate the individual change process of their clients, their individual practice, and agencies, determine the effectiveness of programs and policies, and assess group, organizational and community needs. The sophisticated social worker knows that the available method choices each present strengths and weaknesses that must be understood in order to fully, effectively, and ethically utilize research results. The learning of research is a process of becoming familiar with the relative advantages and disadvantages of the various choices and learning to choose between them. This learning allows the social worker not only to understand the literature that they encounter in professional practice but to also make effective contributions to the practice field through helpful participation in conducting research.

**Course Description:** This course is designed to develop each student’s ability to understand the results of empirical research presented in professional journals including the reading of statistics. In addition to developing the ability to critically analyze research, students will develop an ability to design and conduct basic research studies within the ethical constraints of human research while supporting the underlying ethics, values (human diversity, social justice, self-determination and equality) and principles of the social work profession. In this process students will become familiar with two predominant social science research paradigms; logical positivist and interpretative (relativist) approaches, and explore possibilities for blending methodologies that are qualitative and quantitative in nature to best fit differing research needs. Examples of research drawn from the field of social work will be used to illustrate selected research methodologies. Social research designs covered in this course include case study,

content analysis, single subject/system, ethnographic, experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, and program evaluation methods and designs. The course will introduce students to associated statistical methods that are applicable to the aforementioned methods. Focus will be primarily on reading/interpreting results and understanding appropriate uses of a statistic. Students will also begin to develop their research skills through the experiential component of this course which will consist of developing in collaboration with their practicum agency a limited qualitative and quantitative study to answer a research question of interest. The course emphasizes blending the practitioner/researcher role and therefore making research an integral component of ethically informed effective social work practice.

**Course Objectives:**

1. Articulate the difference between qualitative and quantitative research methods, their philosophical bases, and their strengths and limitations.
2. Discuss how unquestioned assumptions about human diversity, which includes issues concerning gender, ethnicity, age and sexual orientation, can cause biases in question formulation, research design, measurement, sampling, analysis, and results.
3. Describe basic data gathering techniques and the implications of different levels of measurement for social work research.
4. Identify and discuss a variety of methodological approaches to research such as case studies, experimental, participatory, needs assessments and so on.
5. Demonstrate understanding of the various threats to validity and associated reliability questions as applied to research articles and unpublished agency studies that incorporate a range of research methods.
6. Read, interpret, and critique research journal articles based on their consideration of the underlying values, ethics, and principles of social work profession.
7. Develop a working familiarity with library resources necessary to conduct a literature review based on your practicum placement field of study.
8. Demonstrate competency in the computation and interpretation of basic descriptive statistics.
9. Demonstrate competency in the interpretation of basic inferential statistics and their associated research.
10. Demonstrate the use of a computer statistics package to calculate basic statistics.

11. Identify basic steps of the generalist practice model and their connections to scientific inquiry.
12. Discuss the contextual nature of research and its ethical, political, and sociocultural implications.
13. Describe how research findings can contribute to social work's knowledge base and the development of programs and services that promote social justice in our society.

**Required Text:** Research Methods for Social Work, (2001) Rubin & Babbie.

## **1. Assignments:**

### **Integrating Practice/Research Exercises**

Students working in groups will develop and conduct a research project that will include both the collection of quantitative and qualitative data using focus groups as well as the development and distribution of survey instruments. The intent of this assignment is to familiarize students with the practitioner/research role by engaging SW department stakeholders in a research/evaluation process that examines opinions regarding interaction with the department, preparation for practicum placement, the practicum process, and preparation for post graduation employment. Findings from this will be used to improve the practicum and post graduation preparation process within the Department of Social Work.

**A detailed outline will be provided to students regarding the above assignment along with an introduction to the project.**

**All Papers Submitted for this Class Are Required to Be in APA Format.**

## **2. Quizzes/Final Examination:**

There will be 5 short quizzes (30 minutes each). These will consist of matching, true and false, multiple choice and essay questions. Quizzes will cover course reading and class room discussion information. For the final examination you will be evaluating a research article by following guidelines presented prior to the exam and will be based on analysis used during in-class article analysis activities. This evaluation format will be distributed a week before the final. The article will be provided at examination time and a blue book will be used in which to write your responses.

## **3. Incomplete Policy.**

No incomplete grade, "I", will be allowed except in exceptional cases in accordance with university policies regarding Incomplete (I) Grades. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with this policy.

## **4. Timeliness.**

Papers are expected to be turned in on the date specified. Quizzes are expected to be taken during the time provided. Points will be deducted for late papers and quizzes.

## 5. Participation and Attendance

The class will be participating in several hands-on exercises to help facilitate learning of key concepts, including group projects focused on analyzing research articles. Attendance is important for maximum student benefit. The grade will be based upon students attendance and readiness to participate (including: covering readings in advance of class and having materials in hand for group projects as assigned). Note: missing more than 3 classes will result in the student losing one grade level in the class.

## 6. Due Dates

Quiz 1.Week 3

Quiz 2.Week 5

Quiz 3.Week 7

Quiz 4.Week 9

Quiz 5.Week 12

Final Exam. Week 15

Due dates regarding group projects and papers will be included in project detail.

## 7. Determination of Course Grade

Integrative Exercises (4@50)	400 (40%)
Quizzes (6@100 points each)	500 (50%)
Final Examination	100 (10%)
<b>Total Points:</b>	<b>1000 (100%)</b>

<u>Points Earned</u>	<u>Final Grade</u>
1000-900	A
899-800	B
799-700	C
699-600	D
< 600	F

**SCHEDULE****WEEK OF**

**Week One:**  
**September 5, 7**

**Empirically based practice: the research foundation: Introduction.**

Read: Preface/Chapter 1, 2  
 Topics: Introduction to class/assignments, the importance of research to humane, ethical social services. The nature of reality/known and the scientific method. Introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches.

**Week Two:**  
**September 10, 12, 14**

**Research, theory, and practice; the ethics of rational inquiry.**

Read: Chapters 3, 4  
 Topics: The link between theory, research and practice. Research purposes. Introduction to ethical considerations. Cultural &/or gender bias-social and political implications. Benefits vs. costs of research.

**Week Three:**  
**September 17, 19, 21**  
**September 17: QUIZ: WEEKS 1, 2.**

Read: Chapters 5, 6  
 Topics: Research purposes and process. Units of analysis. Measuring anything that exists. Operational considerations; causal relationships, independent/dependent variables Qualitative and Quantitative Measures.

**Week Four:**  
**September 24, 26, 28**

Read: Chapter 7, Handout (Threats to Internal and External Validity)  
 Topics: Measurement. Variation. Levels of Measurement. Frequency Distributions. Introduction to reliability, validity and threats to validity.

**Week Five:****October 1, 3, 5****October 1: QUIZ: WEEKS 3, 4.**

Read Weinbach & Grinnell, (2001). chapter 3.  
 Topics: Descriptive Statistics. Working with measures of central tendency, variability, and percentages,. Standard deviation.

**Week Six:****October 8, 10, 12**

Read: Chapter 11  
 Topics: Descriptive statistics continued, uses of computers in research. Statistical vs practical significance. Parametric and Non-parametric defined. The chi-square statistic. Introduction to single case designs in social work.

**Week Seven:****October 15, 17, 19****October 15: QUIZ: WEEKS 5, 6.**

Read: Chapter 11  
 Topics: Use of single case designs in social work continued: designs, validity. Standard normal distribution/ z scores, skewness.

**Week Eight:****October 22, 24, 26**

Read: Chapter 8  
 Topics: Construction of research instruments. Developing questions and questionnaires. The Mann-Whitney U statistical test.

**Week Nine:****October 29, 31, November 2****October 29 QUIZ: WEEKS 7, 8.**

Read: Chapter 9  
 Topics: Probability and sampling designs. The Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs statistical test.

**Week Ten:  
November 5, 7, 9**

Read: Chapter 10, 17  
 Topics: Validity and the relationship to experimental and quasi-experimental designs. Cause. Introduction to types of inferential statistical tests. Reading inferential statistics, basic concepts, t-tests, analysis of variance.

**Week Eleven:** *Please note: week 11 is dispersed over two calendar weeks beginning with Veteran's day break and ending in Thanksgiving break.*

**November 12 Veteran's Day Break  
 November 14, 16 (class days week 1)  
 November 19 (class day week 2)**

Read: Chapter 12, 18  
 Topics: Methods of survey research - The questionnaire: personal face to face interviewing, mail and telephone interviewing. Reading inferential statistics; regression analysis, logistic regression.

**NOVEMBER 21, 23 THANKSGIVING BREAK**

**Week Twelve:  
 November 26, 28, 30  
 November 26: QUIZ: WEEKS 9, 10, 11.**

Read: Chapter 13  
 Topics: Qualitative research terminology, methods, and issues of establishing validity.

**Week Thirteen:  
 December 3, 5, 7**

Read: Chapter 14  
 Topics: Unobtrusive research methods and secondary analysis.

**Week Fourteen:  
 December 10, 12, 14**

Read: Chapter 19  
 Topics: Program evaluation: types and utilization focused methods.

**December 17 - 21  
 Week Fifteen: Finals Week  
 December ( ): FINAL EXAM: WEEKS 12, 13, 14.**



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